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L A M P S T A N D S

A STUDY OF REVELATION 2 & 3

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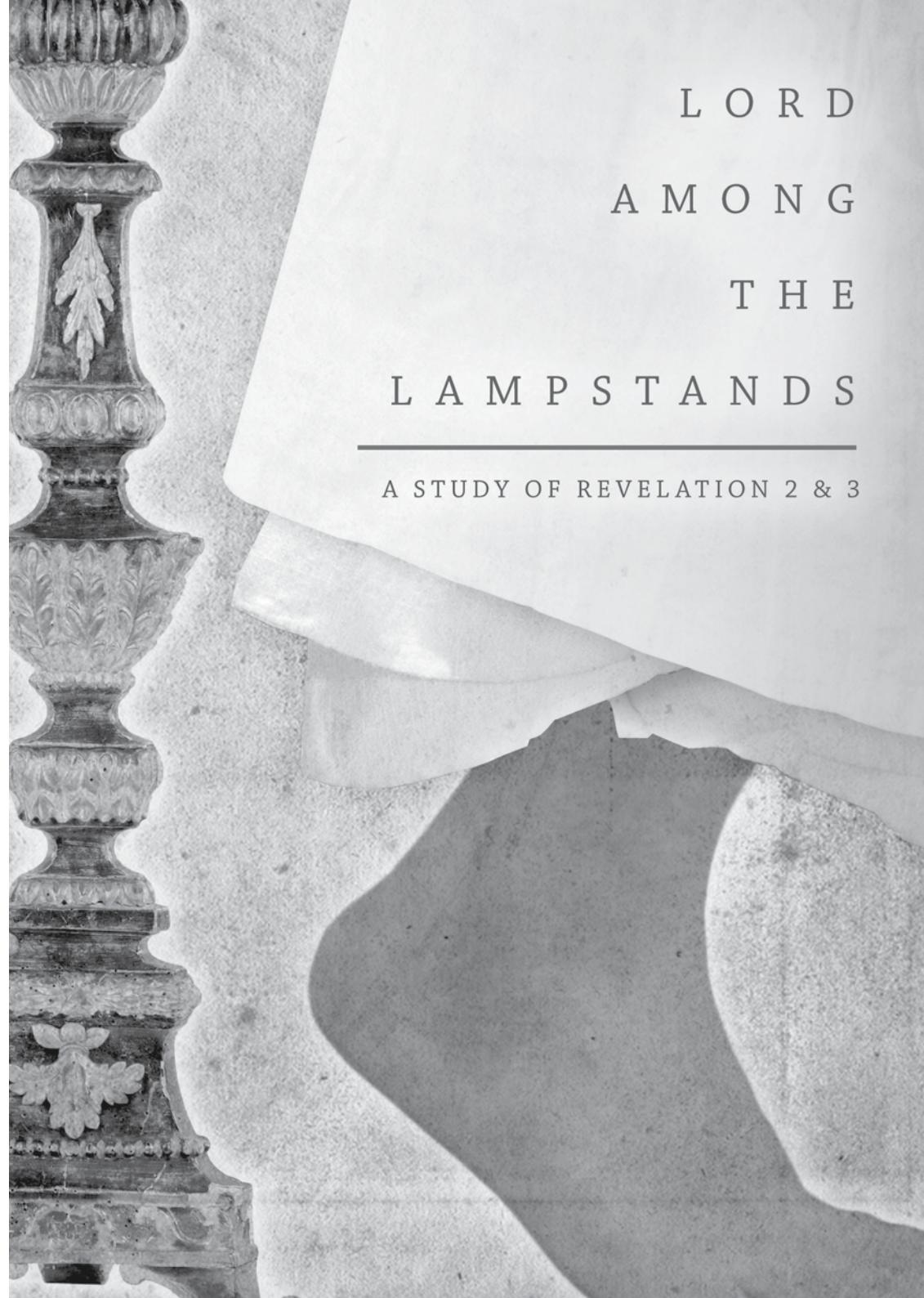
A STUDY OF REVELATION 2 & 3

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P R E F A C E

This study is about Revelation – in several ways. Revelation is the final book in Holy Scripture and that will be our text. ‘Revelation’ means ‘to show’ or ‘to uncover.’ Revelation means that God must be the revealer. He must open our eyes, as King David said, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light” (Psalm 36.9). If we want to know God, we must know Jesus. Revelation is through Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God made flesh.

If we want to know Jesus, we must know the Bible. God’s Word revealed has been accurately kept for us in the Bible. If we want to know the Bible, we must know the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit to reveal God to us! He guided the authors who wrote the Bible and He teaches us as we read it today. The Apostle Paul wrote, “...the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:3, 4). God revealed His message to Paul (and all the Biblical authors) and through them God reveals Himself to us. So, how can we receive God’s revelation?

Pray! Revelation is a gift from Him.

Read! Revelation is written in the Bible.

Share! Revelation is for the whole family of God.

Come to each session having prayed and read for the lesson. Be ready to share the truths He has revealed to you to help your group know Him better. May God graciously use this study of Revelation to reveal more and more of Himself to us!

GETTING STARTED

IN REVELATION

I love my church, the Beijing International Christian Fellowship. What a joy to gather weekly with brothers and sisters from all over the world who love the Lord! What a privilege to worship the Living God and hear His Word. I trust you know this joy in your church too. But at our very best our churches are a work in progress. We are a company of struggling sinners who regularly prove how much we need a Saviour. Yet the important question is, "How does Jesus see our church?" And, even more important, "How can our church be more pleasing to Jesus?"

We'll find these answers as we study Jesus' messages to seven churches in Roman Asia Minor recorded in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. In these seven short letters, Jesus speaks to each believer in the church: "He who has an ear, let him hear." Scripture is a message to all churches throughout all time. Letters addressed to one church are to be read by all churches, because what Jesus says to them is "what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 29, ff.). This plea to hear the words of the Spirit ends each of the seven letters.

In a similar way, the Apostle Paul wrote letters to churches in seven different cities: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. Paul the human author wrote a message for First Century Church members. And the Holy Spirit, the Divine author of Scripture, inspired this timeless message for all God's people in Christ.

I know a number of Christians from many places who fear the book of Revelation. Some fear the message. It can be scary! They do not want to think about a grim future, especially for loved ones who do not know Jesus. Others fear the style of the book. It is weird! What are we supposed to

do with all those beasts and plagues? Some fear they are just not going to understand it anyway. Thus, many Christians have chosen to leave that book in the back of their Bibles unopened.

How should we understand the Revelation? Let's consider three things about this book...

1. IT IS A REVELATION OF CHRIST

"The revelation of Jesus Christ" Revelation 1:1

Revelation is a book about Jesus. That seems quite an obvious truth, but it is often missed. The Apostle John tells us his intentions right from the beginning. The word *revelation* is from a Latin word which means to 'reveal,' 'open,' or 'unveil.' (Apocalypse is a Greek word with the same meaning.) Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. We do not need to decode its message; we need to delight in this revealed portrait of Christ. It was written by the Apostle John (1:9). John's Gospel recorded Jesus' earthly ministry; this book reveals Jesus in ascended glory. We learn about many things in this book - the dark effects of evil in the world, the grim end of those who do not fear God, and the end of the world. Yet all the events of the book are examined in the light of their relationship to Jesus. It is not a book of Revelations, it is rather ONE revelation-it reveals the One who is Lord in His Church standing among the lamp-stands, the Lamb that was slain, the Lion who opens the scroll of history, the Leader of the armies of God, the Lover of His Bride, and the Light who illuminates the Temple of God - this book is a revelation of Jesus Christ.

"The centrality of Christ is the ruling theme of Revelation. All things depend on their relationship to him" (Wilcock, p. 68).

Many teachers of Revelation seek to find its meaning in the headlines of today's newspapers. Looking back on their findings can be a bit embarrassing. Books have been written to prove that this person was the

'beast' or that person the 'false prophet' – with predictions from Hitler to Hussein. Yet those people are long dead, and history moves along. It would seem, despite the fascination many have with such teachings, that the key to understanding Revelation is not in the newspaper.

"John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" Revelation 1:1, 2

Instead, I propose that the key to understanding Revelation is Scripture, particularly the Old Testament prophets. One important principle emphasized during the Reformation was 'Scripture interprets Scripture.' The Church was urged to find the meaning of the Bible within the Bible itself. The marvellous plan of salvation promised and provided by our one True God is declared within the sixty-six books of the Bible. The message is simple but profound, "salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). This wonderful news of salvation is traced throughout biblical history, pictured in Scriptural types, extolled in Psalms of praise, foreseen by prophets, declared by four Evangelists, and applied by Apostles. No book can compare with the magnificent tapestry of Scripture. The Apostle John draws from this biblical storehouse to present the pictures of Revelation. Revelation is a dazzling, dynamic, series of pictures that underscore and echo the Biblical truths found in the first sixty-five books of Scripture. Nothing new is added. Rather, struggling saints are cheered and comforted to hold on to Him who now reigns and will soon return.

"Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." Revelation 1:11

John wrote to believers in these seven churches who were familiar with the visions of the prophets. They searched with eager anticipation for their fulfilment. They understood that in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah has come and the Day of the Lord has begun. Today most of us are too

entertained to read Ezekiel. We have little time for Daniel's visions or the sermons of Isaiah. Therefore, we may fail to recognize that the images used by John are borrowed and blended from the ancient prophets of Scripture.

2. IT IS A REVELATION TO THE CHURCH

"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."
Revelation 1:3

It is unfortunate that some people fear this book, because it is the only book of Scripture that promises a blessing to the reader. This verse also holds a key to our interpretation of the book. In almost two thousand years of studying this book, people have often asked 'when'? Did John see a vision of his own day or the last day? When will these things happen? It seems the answer is all days – past, present, and future. For this blessing is promised to all who read this book - the whole people of God in Christ from the first to the final century.

This means our interpretation of the book cannot be bound exclusively to any one era of the Church. To do so would limit the blessing. What comfort would it be for us today to know that the beast attacking the Church was merely Caesar? or Hitler? What benefit would it have been in ages past to know that the 'stinging locusts' of Chapter 9 are really Apache Helicopters? Indeed there are similarities between many people and events of history and the pictures of Revelation. But no one person or event captures the exclusive meaning. At best they are pointers and examples of the timeless truths of the book. The blessing of this book is for all God's people, from the first right through to the final century.

When John sees Christ, he sees the Church, "him who...walks among the seven golden lampstands" (Revelation 2:1). The first glimpse of our Lord in this book reveals Him among those lampstands: "when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of

man" (Revelation 1:12, 13). We know from the context that lampstands symbolize the Church - ordained by God to shine His light in the world; "the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Revelation 1:20).

The passing of time will never separate the Lord from His Church. Paul exulted in this great truth as he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Jesus reigns as Lord over the world for the advancement of His Church. Behind each decree of state is Jesus' sovereign declaration from the throne in Heaven.

The Lord of the Church entrusts important responsibility to church leaders. The peculiar title "angel" opens each of these seven letters, "To the angel of the church in..." The word 'angel' means messenger in Greek. John very likely uses this as a hidden reference to church leaders for their protection; he does not want them to join him in a Roman prison. Jesus knew all their names, and John would have known many of their names, but they hope the persecuting authorities will not. The Risen Christ holds these endangered leaders in His strong hand: "him who holds the seven stars in his right hand" (Revelation 2:1).

"The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." Revelation 1:20

3. IT IS A REVELATION OF COMFORT AND CHALLENGE

Someone said, "A good sermon should both comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." Jesus does this in His Revelation sermon. John the persecuted Apostle writes from prison to believers. Some of the seven

churches were already undergoing persecution; all of them would eventually. The rich promises of Revelation are a powerful tonic to remain faithful. John is a faithful worker of "Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth" (Revelation 1:5). Even though He was pierced on the cross, He rules now and will return soon. To a church in the heat of suffering Jesus says, "I know your tribulation... Do not fear what you are about to suffer...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." They may die for Him but because of Him they "will not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:9-11). Revelation speaks great comfort to valiant suffering believers – then and now.

In each of the seven letters Jesus says, "I know you..." (2:2, 9, 13, 19, 3:1, 8, 15). For those doing something commendable, like serving and suffering for Him, that knowledge is a great comfort. But for those who are caught in sin by His all-seeing gaze, that knowledge can be terrifying. These letters challenge the idea that believers in the First Century were better than the church in the Twenty-First Century. As we read these letters we will see our ancient brothers and sisters battled with hypocrisy, immorality, false theology, and corrupt leaders in their churches. Those church members caught up in such sins were challenged by the Lord of the Church. To the complacent believers in the churches Jesus warns, "I have this against you..." (Revelation 2:4, 14, 20), "Wake up" (Revelation 3:2), "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16). The wise Chief Shepherd knows the right words for His sheep. Some need comfort, some need challenge, some need both!

So as you study His message to these seven churches may you see Him more clearly, may you gain greater confidence as a member of His Church, and may you receive His comfort and challenge to press on faithfully until He comes again. Don't be afraid! Read and receive His promised blessing.

STRUCTURE OF THE SEVEN LETTERS

Each of the seven letters from Jesus to the churches follows this same format:

1. Receiver: "to the angel of the church...write"
2. Revelation of Christ (from 1:12-20): "the words of him..."
3. Realization: "I know..."
4. Review: a rebuke and/or a praise
5. Reassurance (promise or threat): "I will..."
6. Reward: "to the one who conquers"
7. Reminder: "He who has an ear, let him hear"

(Note: Sometimes 6 & 7 occur in reverse order. Sometimes 4 & 5 are joined together.)

"The seven churches fall into three groups. The first and last (Ephesus and Laodicea) are in danger of losing their identity as a Christian church. They are exhorted to repent in order to prevent their judgment and to inherit the promises that genuine faith deserves. The churches addressed in the three central letters (Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis) have...some who have remained faithful and others who are compromising with pagan culture..."

Pergamum is in the best condition and Sardis is in the worst...The second and sixth letters (Smyrna and Philadelphia) are written to churches which have proved themselves faithful and loyal to Christ's 'name' even in the face of persecution...The significance of this is that the Christian church as a whole is perceived as being in poor condition, since not only are the healthy churches in a minority but the literary pattern points to this emphasis..." (Beale, p. 226).

SEVEN CHURCHES ON A POSTAL ROUTE



"The churches in Revelation 2-3 number exactly seven, that number symbolizes completeness. They stand for all the churches of that time and ours. In fact, the triumphs, failures, and struggles of these churches are a kind of miniature catalogue of the sorts of things we can expect to find in other churches throughout history...We likewise need Christ-like discernment, illumined by the Spirit and by these examples, if we are to evaluate our own church situation accurately and respond faithfully" (Poythress, p. 83).

C O L D , H A R D T R U T H

S E S S I O N 1
R E V E L A T I O N 2 : 1 - 7

I N T R O D U C T I O N

We need truth. Scripture is truth. Jesus is “the truth.” Without truth there would only be falsehood and lies. But truth is not the only attribute of God; He is more than just truth. And, as God’s people, having truth is not all we need to please Him. As we begin our study we face the truth challenge Jesus confronted in Ephesus - the balance of head and heart, life and doctrine, being and doing in the Christian life. It has never been an easy balance to strike.

This is the first of seven messages from Jesus Christ to seven First-Century churches found along a Roman postal route in the land we call Turkey today (see Seven Churches on a Postal Route). Each of the seven letters follows the same format (see Structure of the Seven Letters).

Ephesus was about 100 kilometres across the Aegean Sea from the island of Patmos (1:9) where John the Apostle and author was imprisoned. It was called ‘the metropolis of Asia’ with about 250,000 citizens. Ephesus boasted one of the world’s largest libraries and was a popular centre of occult arts. The outstanding feature of Ephesus was its magnificent temple to the Mother Goddess, known as Artemis to Greeks and Diana to Romans. Her shrine was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Religious pilgrims travelled great distances to consort with her temple prostitutes. She stood as a great source of pride and income to the citizens of Ephesus. But those who became Christians in Ephesus – breaking free from the grip of this goddess – came to see all this as scandalous.

The greatest theologian of the Church, the Apostle Paul, founded the church in Ephesus. He taught there daily for two years (Acts 19:8-10). Then Paul stationed his top lieutenant for duty there, “remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine”

(1 Timothy 1:3). Historians widely believe the Apostle John spent his last years of ministry in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus would have read John's Apostolic letter to the Church. "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

So it is not surprising that Jesus recognizes the doctrinal strength of the Ephesian church (2:2, 3), that they cannot bear false teaching. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to this Ephesian church in the Second Century, saying, "You all live according to the truth and no heresy has a home among you; no, you do not so much as listen to anyone if he speaks against the truth in Jesus Christ." Thus, the Ephesians' theological radar was fully operational. No Scud missiles of heresy could sneak into their orthodox assembly. Jesus commends them for this. Let us see how Jesus helps them to strike the balance of truth.

OPENING

How would you define an "evil man" today?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. a) What does "cannot tolerate evil men" (v2) mean and why is that a good thing?
b) Is it necessary to test everything that we hear and read with God's Word? What are some practical steps to doing this? Individually? With the help of other believers?
2. a) What does Jesus mean by, "... you have left your first love" (v4)?
b) What are some possible causes of someone leaving his first love? What would be some warning signs that one is moving in that direction? What role do emotions play in loving Christ?
3. a) Why should the Ephesians "remember from where you have fallen"?
b) Consider the relationship between "repentance" and "works." If there were no works, would there be true repentance?
4. What is the lampstand? What does it mean to have it removed? Why does He not just extinguish the lampstand? Where does He move it to?

5. a) What does Jesus hate? Is there a conflict between this hating and Jesus being loving?
b) It is commonly said, "Love the sinner and hate their sin." Is that what Jesus is doing in verse 6? Does the final judgment against sinners (Revelation 20:11-15) show that God's love will have an end point?
6. a) What is the "tree of life" (Genesis 2:8-9)? Why did God block the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24)? How can we access the tree(s) of life now (Revelation 22:1-2)? Who will benefit from this tree?
b) What is the meaning of His promise, "I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God"?

A P P L I C A T I O N & D I S C U S S I O N A T T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

This church was commended for their perseverance and not growing weary. Is there currently a situation in your life that is causing you to grow weary? If so, how are you handling it? How can you overcome and enjoy the tree of life in Paradise? What thoughts, words, and actions will fan the flame of your love for Christ and others?

F O R F U R T H E R S T U D Y

1. Reflecting on Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:28-32), how well has this church obeyed his exhortation?
2. What does it mean to "love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and

- strength" (See Mark 12:28-31)?
3. How does Jesus say we show our love for Him (See John 14:15, 21, 23)?
4. Are "overcomers" a special class of believers or all believers? How do the following Scriptures help to answer the question (1 John 4:4, 5:4-5, Revelation 21:5-7)?
5. What warnings are we given in these passages concerning false teachers (Matthew 7:15-16, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 2 John 7)?
6. Jesus commended them for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which He also hates (2:6). What else does God hate according to these verses? (Proverbs 6:16-19, Jeremiah 44:2-4, Zechariah 8:17). Are you guilty of any of these things in your life?
7. In verse 7 a great blessing is promised to overcomers. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13 and list some things we need to do if we are to persevere in faithfulness.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

REVELATION 2:1 - 7

2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands."

Relevant pieces from the composite picture of our glorious Lord (1:12-20) are woven into the introduction of each letter. Through these symbols the churches are reminded that Jesus really is their greatest need. He is always found among His faithful church (lampstands) and faithful messengers (angel/stars) are secure in His grip. Even as the letter opens, He comforts the determined ones and challenges ones who are drifting.

2:2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false."

Paul gave a strong doctrinal warning to the elders of the church in Ephesus on his last visit with them: "Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:28-31). "The

church seems to have fallen back into the defensive posture of orthodoxy rather than continue the offensive of evangelism. This may have been due to the pressures which Ephesus was putting upon the church, thus the double reference to endurance" (Mulholland, p. 56).

2:3 "I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary."

"Paul had left Ephesus and died long ago, but the unpopularity of Christians still lingered. Christians in Ephesus knew what it was to be hated, to be snubbed in public and maligned in private. Some found business hard, since they were losing customers. Others found shopping a problem as a number of tradesmen would not sell to Christians" (Stott, p. 24). These believers very likely faced an economic boycott for refusing to worship the Roman Emperor and their Ephesian "goddess." Most citizens bore the "mark" of loyalty to these idolatrous beasts. "No one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name" (Revelation 13:17). Instead, these Christians chose to bear the "mark" of loyalty to God's Kingdom (Revelation 14:1).

2:4 "But I have this against you, that you

have abandoned the love you had at first."

They had backslidden from the heights of God-honouring worship. Their diligence in doctrine had become drudgery. Naked truth is not enough. Truth must be clothed with love, "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Love without truth is too soft, and truth without love is too hard. Without love Christians can turn sour and cynical. Paul wrote: "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an *undying love*" (Ephesians 6:24). With the passing of three decades, the embers of their love had cooled.

2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

Without Christ the church is closed. Sometimes churches continue their operations in the power of man, but the Lord and His Word are no longer served. God's church can become man's club. Sadly, today Ephesus is just a collection of stones. There is no church, indeed there is no city! No people live among its ancient ruins. The lampstand was removed; indeed, the whole city is gone. Earthquakes have so filled the Cayster River with silt that the Aegean Sea is now several miles away from the ruins of ancient Ephesus. Some things are optional in a church, but Jesus and His Word are crucial.

2:6 "Yet this you have: you hate the works of

the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

They were attentive to both general theological error and specific false teachings. We do not know who the Nicolaitans were and what was their error. The only reference to them occurs in these letters of Jesus to Ephesus and Pergamum. The Greek word 'nikolaos' means 'destroyer of the people.' Thus, Nicolaitans was a fitting name for a sect that did great damage to these churches.

2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Overcomers are those who have remained faithful to Christ and His Word to the end – He is the Conqueror! The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was built on an ancient tree-shrine. But Jesus exceeds Diana. He offers the tree of life and the endless delight of eternal life

(Revelation 22:2). "Paradise regained is greater and more glorious than paradise lost, just as the fulfilment is more than the promise and the harvest than the seed. As the conclusion of this book of Revelation shows, in the renewed and glorified creation the tree of life will be unfailingly fruitful and the multitude of the redeemed will freely partake of its plenty. Thus is symbolized the fullness of that everlasting life in Christ which God's faithful ones are given to inherit" (Hughes, p. 38).

BORN TWICE, DIE ONCE...

SESSION 2
REVELATION 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION

Some comfortable Christians view Revelation as a puzzle book to speculate about how their life can come to a happily-ever-after ending. But Christians under attack cherish this picture-book which assures them that no matter how difficult life may become, Jesus is Victorious and they will overcome in Him. Affluent Christians debate about Revelation, afflicted Christians delight in its promised hope. The faithful in Smyrna, our second church to study, were in serious need of hope.

Smyrna was a beautiful city located 60 kilometers north of Ephesus. It was called “The Pride of Asia.” It was blessed with a deep harbour and well-protected gulf. Therefore it became a major centre of shipping on the Aegean Sea. Its population was 200,000. From Smyrna there were good roads into the interior of the province. Today Smyrna is called Izmir, the second largest city of modern Turkey. Smyrna was a long-time loyal ally of Rome. In 195 B.C. Smyrna built the temple *“Dea Roma”* which depicts Rome personified as a goddess. In 25 A.D. the city was chosen to build a temple to the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Because of that prestigious honour, all the people in Smyrna were expected to offer incense on the fire before the Emperor’s bust. This ‘worship’ was more about politics than passion, but it secured their alliance with Rome. Christians generally refused, and thus were called ungrateful, unpatriotic, and disloyal. From 81 and 96 A.D., when Revelation was written, the Roman Emperor Domitian claimed divinity. He ordered his subjects to address him as “god and lord” or else face his persecution.

The Jews in Smyrna were the first to point their fingers in damning blame against the followers of the Nazarene. First-Century Jews enjoyed a privileged position under Roman law. They could worship freely. This meant they did not have to render devotion to the Roman gods and Caesars.

History showed that Jews would fight valiantly in defence of their radical monotheism, so Rome pragmatically exempted them from State ‘idolatry.’ The earliest Christians, who were ‘completed Jews,’ enjoyed that exemption too. But as the Church became more and more Gentile, the Jews made it clear to the Romans, “*They’re not with us; and they’re not for you.*”

We do not know who founded this faithful church; it may have been Paul or one of his disciples. We know Paul spent two years in nearby Ephesus preaching and teaching to “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). Smyrna was one of just two congregations who received only words of commendation and no rebukes from the mouth of our Lord Jesus.

Yet, their loyal obedience is met with even more promised persecution. The Church follows a Crucified Master. More Christians were killed for Jesus in the Twentieth Century than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. The killing of Christians happens so frequently today it is often unreported – it is no longer news! We naturally shrink from the horrible words we read in this short letter, “**suffering, poverty, slander**, being **afraid, prison, tested, persecuted**, and **facing death**.” But we cannot faithfully interpret the message of Jesus if we ignore these words. Many have died for Him. We will all die once. But if we have been born twice, we will only die once. In Jesus, we need not fear the second death.

OPENING

Have you experienced suffering in your life? Did you find it difficult to stand firm? How did you handle the situation?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would the description of Christ in verse 8 be especially encouraging for the church in Smyrna? Which attributes of God most comfort you in the midst of trials and why? How would you encourage someone who is being persecuted for their faith or going through a tough time?
2. What three troubles does Jesus see afflicting the church at Smyrna in verse 9? What does it mean to be rich in the midst of poverty (Consider 2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9 and James 2:5)?
3. Jesus, and all the Apostles (including John who wrote Revelation), were Jews. How can we understand these difficult words, “the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan?” Today, do we need to apologize for Jesus saying this? If not, how would we explain these words to a Jew today (Consider John 8:31-47 and Romans 2:28-29)?
4. According to verse 10 what did the future hold for the church at Smyrna? Is ten days a short or a long period of time? What would happen to them after those ten days? Is it fair that these who are already in the midst of tribulation (v 9) will be tested further?

5. Some believers think we will not suffer tribulation. How does that compare with what those in Smyrna experienced? How about believers who are suffering for their faith in various places today? Based on Jesus' message to Smyrna what should we expect? What does it mean to "be faithful until death?"
6. Faith and fear are opposites. They cannot coexist. Faith banishes fear. Is there anything in your life that is causing you to be fearful? What does Jesus promise to the one who conquers in verse 11? Are you confident about your eternal destiny (If not, find a good time to have a talk with a trusted Christian friend!)?
3. How are you rich in Christ (Reading Ephesians 1 would be a good reminder)?
4. What are some reasons God allows suffering in our lives (Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Hebrews 5:8, Hebrews 12:4-11, 1 Peter 4:12-19)?
5. The "crown of life" is one of several "crowns" mentioned in Scripture. What are the other "crowns" and to what are they referring (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 1 Peter 5:4, Revelation 4:4)? According to Revelation 4:9-11, what are these "crowns" ultimately for?

APPLICATION & DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT SESSION

Do you fear God more than people? Are you a God pleaser more than a people pleaser? If so, how is that evident in your life?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How can we better appreciate Jesus as He "who was dead, and has come to life" through these verses (Romans 6:8-9, Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 Peter 3:18)?
2. How will these verses encourage you when you pass through challenges for your faith (Hebrews 2:17-18, Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 12:3)?
6. According to Revelation 20:14-15 and 21:8, what is the "second death" and who will experience it? What can we learn about the power of the second death in Revelation 20:6?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

REVELATION 2:8-11

2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.'

The Lord Jesus Christ has an unrivalled authority. He alone has transcended death. "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was *impossible for death to keep its hold on him*" (Acts 2:24). Before we were born He was Alpha, long after we are gone He will be the Omega: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold *I am alive for ever and ever!*" (Revelation 1:18).

This declaration held special meaning for the believers in Smyrna. About 700 years before this letter was written, Smyrna was destroyed by the Lydians. And after that tragic destruction their city lay in ruins for three hundred years. But then the city once dead became "alive" again as it was rebuilt. The Risen Christ writes to redeemed believers who live in a risen city. And by faith in Him they will rise far beyond Smyrna to God's eternally beautiful city. Death is the beginning of real life for these faithful ones. For them, like their Lord, the cross will lead to a crown.

2:9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are

not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

Our God and Lord spoke these words to the afflicted saints in Smyrna. It is likely that a significant cause of their poverty was their disfavour with the political leadership. To defy the Emperor and his cult was financial suicide. The physical kinsmen of our Lord Jesus were the first to follow Him and also the first to fight against Him and His followers. "Though ethnically descended from Israel's patriarchs, the opponents' actions show that they are not God's people but Satan's synagogue. The issue is not birth from the flesh but birth from the Spirit, just as the circumcision that marks God's people is not a fleshly surgery but a cleansing of heart by the Spirit" (Johnson, p. 74).

These stinging words show Jesus is not 'politically correct' for the Twenty-First Century. Yet Scripture teaches that anyone, even the Apostle Peter (Matthew 16:23), who stands in the way of God's Kingdom advance, willingly or unknowingly, allies themselves with the Evil One. We who follow the Crucified King should hasten to add, in the light of horrors done in the name of religion, that killing anyone in the name of God is Satanic! Sadly, some terrible things have been done in His Righteous Name.

2:10 "Do not fear what you are about to

suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Some synagogue members rejected the truth of Jesus and fulfilled His words of warning: "They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when *anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God*" (John 16:2). "Make no mistake: it does not always pay to be a Christian. Nor is honesty always the best policy, if material gain is your ambition. Poverty has often been part of the cost of Christian discipleship" (Stott, p. 39).

Roman prison was a place of detention for the accused until their case was decided. It was not unusual for prisoners to be tortured to make the desired confession. But sometimes Roman prison cells, from Jerusalem to Rome, became sanctuaries. They were hallowed by the praises of God's unjustly imprisoned servants. The phrase "crown of life" describes the perishable laurel wreath awarded to the victors in the ancient Olympic Games. But those who paid the ultimate price in Smyrna received an eternally enduring reward.

One difficult aspect of interpreting Revelation is the numbers we find in verse 10; such as "ten days...42 months...1,260 days...and three and a half days...one thousand years." These numbers open the hot question, "Do you interpret this book

literally?" Unfortunately, for many this word "literal" has become a substitute for the word "true." Something can be true without being literal. Jesus can be "the door" without being a slab of wood. We must always take the Bible most seriously. Yet we need to determine from the type of literature in use whether it is literal. A large portion of the Bible, including this book of Revelation, is symbolic poetry. Yet all of it is God's true, authoritative, inerrant Word.

The number ten, like seven, indicates completion in Scripture. The hand of God inscribed ten laws on tablets of stone. Ten Jewish believers were needed to constitute a synagogue. If there had been ten righteous people in ancient Sodom that city would have been spared. God's Tabernacle was perfectly enclosed by ten curtains. No doubt as the faithful in Smyrna passed through painful days of suffering they must have seemed quite long. But from God's eternal perspective they were a brief "ten days." The suffering believers in Smyrna knew from these words that the God who transcends time had appointed a passing time of suffering for them. He who is sovereign over time was their Saviour."

2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."

The second death is a place of horrible eternal suffering, "The lake of fire is the second death" (Revelation 20:14). Those

who reject Jesus, those born only once, will die twice – both physically and spiritually. But if by grace through faith you are born again, you will pass through your first and only death into His glorious presence. Jesus took our second death by suffering in our place upon the cross. “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). Sufferings pass in “ten days,” blessings last “a thousand years.”

“Let the Christian take heart. For the Christ who unveils this dismaying prospect is the one who himself has been through a Smyrna-experience. Like their city, their Lord also ‘died and came to life’ and guarantees resurrection for them too” (Wilcock, p. 46).

BOUNDARIES: FIRM AND FUZZY

SESSION 3
REVELATION 2:12-17

INTRODUCTION

Life can be complicated. Some decisions are black and white. But many issues are shades of grey. Some things are always wrong, other things are sometimes right. Is there no absolute truth? Yes, there is, absolutely! But as Christians we need to admit some boundaries are firm, others are fuzzy, and the challenge we often face is to know the difference.

Thus far we have heard the Exalted Christ speak love to the church in Ephesus, suffering to Smyrna, and now truth to Pergamum. Pergamum, the third city we visit in our study, was located 90 kilometers north of Smyrna, 25 kilometers inland from the Aegean Sea. The city was built on a cone-shaped hill about 400 meters high. The word Pergamon means “citadel” (fortified place). They boasted a library of 200,000 volumes. In fact the writing medium of parchment was invented there. Pergamum was a city in search of truth.

Yet the ‘father of lies’ lived in Pergamum too. Roman gods, Greek gods, and the healing god Asklepios were zealously worshipped there. Ancient Pergamum was full of falsehood, superstition, and fear. In order to cope in this troubled city, some believers in Pergamum embraced false teaching like that once taught by Balaam. God incited the downfall of Israel by showing them the dangerous pleasures of Balak’s Moab – their delicious foods, their delightful women, and then their soul-destroying gods. This ancient tragedy was repeated in the church of Pergamum.

“If the church would just heed the siren call of Balaam,” so some taught, “many doors of opportunity would open.” They would be welcomed into the trade guilds and thus get the best jobs. They could enjoy the tastiest meat in the marketplace that had been offered to idols. They would be invited to participate in all the activities of Roman society. They could expect the best

seats in the theatre, their daughters would get ballet lessons, and their sons could play football! Even death would be more advantageous since the trade guilds insured a proper burial. Why would anyone want to remain with those socially outcast followers of Jesus?

“Seduction, or persecution – the choice of evils the world offers the church. A soft-centred permissive society can be curiously hard on those who refuse to go along with it...either you buy or you burn” (Wilcock, p. 48).

Today’s Christians sometimes feel they must make spiritual compromises to get the job they need. Sometimes believers follow ‘Asklepios’ - trusting more in doctors and technology to heal than in our Great Physician. Some have become materially rich but through compromise have become spiritually poor. Keeping up with the ‘latest entertainment’ can wear down our standards. How foul must our media heroes become before we switch them off? “In a culture like ours, where toleration has become the primary virtue, it is easy for the community of faith to ‘Christianize’ tolerance and allow all sorts of destructive perspectives and behaviours into its fellowship. Since the surrounding culture cultivates and promotes toleration as the ultimate level of maturity and caring, who would want to be accused of being ‘intolerant?’” (Mulholland, p. 68).

Can we still see the right boundaries? Do they stand firm any longer? Or, has everything just become morally fuzzy? What does Jesus say?

O P E N I N G

How does the Word of God judge the intentions and thoughts of the heart (Verse 12)? Can you share about a time when God's Word convicted your heart of sinful attitude or action?

D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why is this description of Christ especially appropriate for this church (Verse 12)? What do you learn about Jesus as the Judge in these verses?
2. What did Jesus commend this church for (verse 13)? How would you summarize this commendation in one word?
3. Pergamum was a place where Satan ruled (verse 13). In what areas of our society today are we allowing Satan to rule or gain power? In which areas do you personally need to improve in order to stand firm against the schemes of the devil? What are some examples of ways we may subtly deny Christ?
4. Are you aware of anyone around you who is teaching or following false doctrine (verse 14)? Are you ignoring someone in the church who is blatantly disobedient and compromising with the world? How should you be helping them?
5. How are you doing in the area of steadfastness and faithful witness for Christ (verses 14-17)? Are you taking full advantage of what God has made available to you in order to stand firm? How does Christ nourish and sustain you spiritually on a daily basis?

6. What "cost" are you being asked to pay for the sake of Christ? Are there areas where you are embracing the world's values instead of kingdom values (2:15, 16)? If so, what do you need to do to follow Jesus' instruction to this church?

7. What three things did Jesus promise to the one who overcomes (2:17)? Regardless of the full meaning of the "hidden manna" and "the white stone with a new name," one thing is certain. Their promises are from and fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ. We may experience a small glimpse of these promises in this life, but their fullness will be grasped when we see Him face to face! How do these three promises to the overcomers encourage you to live now with an eternal perspective rather than from a temporal, earthly perspective?

A P P L I C A T I O N & D I S C U S S I O N A T T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

So how can we faithfully follow Jesus in this fuzzy modern world? How can we make righteous decisions where Scripture is apparently 'silent'? It is true that we cannot find a Bible verse to address every complex situation of our lives. But we can view our questions through the lens of the foundational principles of Scripture. Consider these four important issues in each decision you face.

- What will it do for God? Will it promote His Glory?
- What will it do for His Church? Will it enhance her Edification (spiritual improvement)?
- What will it do for the World? Will it advance its Evangelization?
- What will it do for you? Will it strengthen your Sanctification (holiness)?

F O R F U R T H E R S T U D Y

1. Jesus describes Himself as the "One who has the sharp two-edged

sword." What does the "sword" symbolize according to these verses (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12-13, Revelation 2:16, 19:11-16)?

2. Considering Satan "lived" in Pergamum it is interesting what Jesus did NOT tell them to do. They are not told to move to another city (as we might like to do)! What are they told to do about Satan (verses 13 and 16)? How does this compare to tactics against Satan in the church today (Consider 1 Peter 5:8.9 and Jude 9)?

3. The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-25. Being fearful of the Israelites because of what they had done to the Amorites, Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse them. After trying unsuccessfully three times to curse Israel, Balaam came up with another plan. He counselled them to have Moabite women seduce Israelite men into intermarriage, creating an ungodly union of Israel through fornication and idolatrous feasts. Jesus rebuked teachers in this church, like Balaam, who turned people away from God's holiness and truth. What are some tempting compromises we face that could potentially undermine our faith? What are unbalanced teachings in the Church today that tempt us to compromise our values and integrity?

4. How was the situation in 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 similar to the church at Pergamum? How should the Corinthians have responded? Paul rebuked them for becoming "arrogant." Why would arrogance keep Christians from dealing with the sin appropriately?

5. Jesus rebuked this church for tolerating those who were following the false teaching that promoted idolatry and immorality. Instead, they should have confronted them. The church at Pergamum failed to

practice church discipline. According to Matthew 18:15-18, what is the proper way to practice church discipline? Why do some churches, like Pergamum, shy away from this? Have you seen church discipline exercised? If so, what were the results?

6. In the Bible, names reflected one's character (Verse 17, Genesis 17:5-6, 17:15-16, 35:9-12). If God were to rename you based on your character, what would you want it to be and why?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

REVELATION 2:12-17

2:12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'

Jesus reveals Himself as deadly-serious to this wavering church in Pergamum. They needed to reckon with His Word that divides truth from error. The search for truth ends with the Word from His mouth. Remember this description - "out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword" (Revelation 1:16) - is not a photograph. Rather, it was John's spiritual impression of the power of Christ's Word. The executive authority of this Word is unrivalled. It's 'double edge' corrects both the sinners and their supporters in the church.

"God's way to overcome error is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ which is God's power of salvation to everyone who believes. Falsehood will not be suppressed by the gruesome methods of inquisition, or by the burning of heretics at the stake, or by restrictive State legislation, or even by war. Force of arms cannot conquer ideas. Only truth can defeat error. The false ideologies of the world can be overthrown only by the superior ideology of Christ. We have no other weapon but this sword" (Stott, p. 63).

2:13 "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and

you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

The believers in Pergamum had to deal with the ultimate 'bad neighbour!' Imagine the shock of discovering, "you live where Satan has his throne!" The hostility to the church in Pergamum came from Gentile pagans. There were three sources of conflict: i) Romans gods, ii) the 'healing god' Asklepios which was symbolized by a serpent, and iii) Greek gods. There was an enormous temple to "Zeus the Saviour" located on the city's highest point.

The storm of persecution that was about to strike Smyrna, had already burst upon Pergamum. Antipas, one of their noble believers, paid the highest price as he was "killed among you." Jesus "the faithful witness" (Revelation 1:5) calls him "my faithful witness." Martin Luther said, "The devil is God's devil." He is not God or a god, but merely a creature of the one true God. Jesus does not tell these believers to leave this 'hometown' of Satan. Nor does He tell them to live in fear. He calls on them to 'conquer' in Him (verse 17).

"Those steeped in Rome's civil religion, especially Asians accustomed to deified monarchs, would view with suspicion

anyone who declined to honour the emperor as Lord and God. Such simmering suspicion could boil over into mob violence to teach such troublemakers a lesson in loyalty. When Satan flexed his strength on the site of his throne, silencing Antipas's witness by bloodshed, the church stood fast" (Johnson, p. 76)

Jesus commands the resolve of the saints in Pergamum. Christians everywhere are called to stand firm on the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is absolute!

From this, and other verses, we learn that judgment in the book of Revelation is not all going to come at the end of time (John 3:18). Jesus is already walking among the lampstands in His Church. Ananias and Saphira went abruptly into eternity for lying to the Holy Spirit. Some Corinthian believers who abused the Lord's Supper died. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

2:14 "But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality."

According to the pattern of these letters, our Lord moves from commendation to words of concern. It was commendable that the

believers in Pergamum stood with resolve against the direct attacks of Satan. But if the 'roaring lion' cannot break through the front door, the serpent looks for a window (see Revelation 12:9). The Tempter enticed, "If they would just heed the siren call of Balaam, many doors of opportunity would open for them."

Three times Moab's King Balak ordered Balaam to curse Israel. But each time God turned the curse into a blessing. Yet Balaam had a clever plan to make Israel fall. Make Moab friendly! Offer your enticing women, tasty foods, and friendly gods (Numbers 25:1-9, 31:15, 16). "Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies" (Mounce, p. 81). Commentators disagree whether their "sexual immorality" was physical adultery or spiritual idolatry. The answer is probably both.

2:15 "So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."

The 'Nicolaitans' plagued believers in Ephesus and Pergamum. They are named but not clearly identified. The meaning for the Greek word "Nicolaitans" is 'to rule the people.' Here in Pergamum their error is linked to "Balaam" which in Hebrew means 'lord of the people.' Whatever this false teaching was, it was linked with compromise in the area of immorality and idolatry.

Modern Nicolaitans in Pergamum echoed

Balaam's enticements - "Hey, do you want to wind up dead like Antipas? That's very extreme!...Why not, put a little incense on the altar before the bust of Caesar?...What can it hurt to mumble a few meaningless words, 'Caesar is Lord'?...While you're down there – check out the temple prostitutes – men and women!...Take it simple – take the easy way – everyone is doing it!" Temptation is timeless.

2:16 "Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."

Some in Pergamum became the willing victims of Satan's siren song and embraced the lie of the Nicolaitans. Some Christians in Pergamum supported their misdeeds either by words of false affirmation or by the silence of false assurance. This false teaching and practice was done by some and tolerated by all. Both groups must repent. The grim alternative to repentance is having Christ Himself fight against you. His spoken Word will cut through every entanglement with falsehood (Revelation 1:16). Antipas their martyr had felt the sword of Rome, now the church in Pergamum was about to feel the sword of Christ. But the door of God's grace and opportunity remains open! It was not yet too late for them to repent.

2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that

no one knows except the one who receives it."

The word 'manna' means, 'What is this?' Israel failed to recognize God's gracious provision. Yet His promise was to the Spirit-filled in Pergamum who had "ears to hear." "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:48-51). The faithful in Pergamum had no need for the table of idols; they were invited to God's table.

Many suggestions have been offered to explain the "white stone." Perhaps it is the opposite of what we know as "black-balling" in reference to rejecting someone for their wrong choice. Or perhaps, "The 'white stone' may refer to the ballot that was used by citizens of a Roman city to cast their votes during meetings. To have such a stone, one's name had to be on the citizenship rolls of the city. Jesus seems to be indicating that God's faithful people are citizens of God's kingdom" (Mulholland, p. 67).

The key to understanding the blessed meaning of this verse lies not in the colour of the stone but the name it bears – Jesus. His name is now new; no longer suffering, He is now sovereign, no longer crucified, He is now crowned with glory and honour. His new name bears unrivalled power and authority, and we now stand in Him, strong to face all adversity.

"The incarnate Son who was crucified for us is now the risen and ascended Christ, removed indeed from our physical sight now that he has entered into the heavenly sanctuary. It is he, then, who is the Hidden Manna that sustains and strengthens us on our pilgrimage to the celestial city, while at the same time, because he is our Life, we have the assurance that our life is 'hid with Christ in God'" (Hughes, p. 59).

THE SCATTERED FIELD

SESSION 4
REVELATION 2:18 - 29

INTRODUCTION

Jesus taught that His Kingdom is like a field where weeds and wheat grow together until the final harvest (Matthew 13:24-30). As they grow, it is difficult to recognize the true “children of the kingdom.” Sometimes it seems weeds have completely over-run the wheat. The ancient church in Thyatira was such a ‘scattered field.’

Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, but they received the longest letter from our Lord Jesus. The city was located 65 kilometres inland from Pergamum, half way to Sardis. Thyatira was a commercial centre, famous for its textiles, especially the production of purple dye, and its trade guilds. It was a major trans-shipment point for trade between the Mediterranean and the East.

If you want something, you need to know the right people. That was true even in the ancient world. In Thyatira the places of greatest ‘connection’ were societies they called ‘guilds.’ “More trade guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city... woolworkers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers and bronze-smiths” (Ramsay, p. 324). An ancient guild was more than a labour union; it was also a religious organization. Various pagan religious practices were required for membership. These pagan feasts usually led to idol worship, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity.

These pervasive guilds caused a moral conflict for followers of Jesus in Thyatira. ‘Standard’ behaviour for citizens was sinful for believers. Yet Christians also needed to buy and eat in Thyatira. So, many in the church thought the Lord Himself sent a solution through a teacher among them who revealed the “deep secret.” She was a woman with a welcome message: “Relax!” she taught, “*Your behaviour has nothing to do with your belief. If the*

Lord is in you, you can handle fire and not get burned.”

Some in the church at Thyatira embraced this ‘liberating truth.’ But opponents of this new teaching considered it a ‘solution from Satan.’ And still others did not know what to believe or do. The church fragmented and thus failed to faithfully represent her Lord.

We modern Christians learn an important lesson from the struggle within this ancient church. Materialism can be more damaging to faith than persecution. Persecution often drives wounded believers to their Healing King. But materialism often drives a wedge between the believer and his Lord. As we will see later in Revelation, when the Beast and the Dragon cannot destroy the Church, Satan sends the harlot of materialism (Chapters 17 & 18). Thankfully, Jesus exposed this false teaching. If this woman’s lie - that there is no fundamental difference between Fallen Babylon and the New Jerusalem - had gone unchallenged, Christianity would be an ancient relic of forgotten philosophy today.

How can our church today be “in” the world but not “of the world?” Let’s hear the vital message of our Exalted Lord to Thyatira.

OPENING

When does it bring comfort to know that God sees and knows your heart (verses 18 and 23)? When does it bring anxiety?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This is the only time in the book of Revelation the title “Son of God” (verse 18) is used. What does this claim indicate and why might it have been used only with this church?
2. What did Jesus commend this church for and why are these qualities so vital to spiritual growth (verse 19)? How are these qualities that He praises related to each other? Which quality(s) describes you consistently? In which are you the weakest?
3. What is Jesus’ criticism of this church (verses 20-23) and how does it compare/contrast with His criticism of the church at Pergamum (verses 14-15)? What does this passage tell us about the woman “Jezebel”?
4. There are those in the Thyatira church who are not only tolerating Jezebel, but they are also engaging in the sinful acts she is encouraging. How does a believer get to that point of becoming so easily swayed by lies and sin?
5. What is Jesus’ instruction to the faithful “remnant” in the church (verse 24)? What are some of the lies that the “world” and Satan tell us that are contrary to God’s truth? Why do we sometimes believe them more than we do God’s Word?

- What things in your daily life are you exposed to or involved with that might subtly distract or pull you away from a closer walk with the Lord (verse 25)?
- Jesus gives promises to the one who overcomes (verses 26-29). What is different here from the previous verses addressed to the one who overcomes (verses 7, 10, 11, 17)? What are some possible reasons for these differences? Which promises speak most to your life right now?

APPLICATION & DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT SESSION

According the diagram below the church in Thyatira was the most complex. Within their assembly were the ‘perfect,’ the ‘problem,’ and even the ‘perverse.’ Where would you place your church on this diagram?

| Ephesus Problem | Smyrna Perfect | Pergamum Problem |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|
| Thyatira All three-Problem, Perfect, Perverse | | |
| Sardis Perverse | Philadelphia Perfect | Laodicea Perverse |

Mulholland, p. 53

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- What do these passages reveal about the character of God (Genesis 16:13, Jeremiah 11:20, 17:9-10, 20:12, Acts 1:24, 15:8)? As God looks at us with His penetrating all-seeing eyes (verse 18), would He be pleased

with us as a church? Would He be pleased with you as an individual? If so, why?

- “...your latter works exceed the first” (verse 19). In what ways do you see progress and growth in your walk with God? If you feel you are stagnant in your walk, what steps do you need to take?
- What do we know about the Old Testament Jezebel from these passages (1 Kings 16:30-31, 18:4, 18:19, 19:1-2, 21:25-26, 2 Kings 9:22)? Do we have such a “Jezebel” in the Church today? What must we do?
- How do we “hold fast” in a practical sense to what we have until He comes (verse 25)? What do these verses have to say about “holding fast” (Deuteronomy 11:22-23, 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, 1 Timothy 6:12, Hebrews 10:23)? Are you holding strong or are you wavering?
- In our world today toleration of differing ideas is a great virtue, especially in religion. What does God say about tolerating ideas which are different from His (verses 20-25)? In what ways does the world refuse to tolerate God’s ideas? How can we be faithful to Jesus and friendly with people in this world?
- Psalm 2 is a Messianic promise of the Father giving rule over the nations to the Son. This psalm is frequently quoted in the New Testament as fulfilled by Jesus Christ the great Son of David. Consider which aspects of the Psalm are quoted here (verses 26 & 27). What do you learn about Jesus’ kingly reign from these passages (See also Revelation 11:15-18, 19:11-16)?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

REVELATION 2:18 - 29

2:18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.'

Six hundred years before this church began, the Prophet Daniel in Babylon saw "*a man... his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze*" (Daniel 10:4-6). Now, in the fullness of time, this Glorious One spoke to the saints in Thyatira. Jesus' feet excel the best bronze from their Guilds. The dirty deeds of the compromised believers in this church were done in darkness, beyond the gaze of other church members. They thought they lived a secret life, but the One who spoke to this church was "the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire" (v 18). This is the only time the title 'Son of God' occurs in the book of Revelation. Jesus wants these who live in a city that claimed to be the centre for the worship of Apollo, the Sun god, to know that He is the true Son of God.

2:19 "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."

The faithful in Thyatira are commended by the Head of the Church for refusing this woman's corrupt teaching (v 24). They were praised for love (the greatest virtue), for

faith (completely trusting in Christ alone) and for not wavering in their devotion, doctrine, and duty. Perhaps the greatest tribute was for their steadily growing progress in grace and godliness.

Jesus searches our beliefs and our behaviour: "I know your deeds" (v 19). Both are essential. He commands the one who "*overcomes and does my will to the end*" (v. 26). From the scene of final judgment in this book we read, "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were *judged according to what they had done* as recorded in the books" (Revelation 20:12). Our works cannot save us, but we will not be saved without good works.

"Thyatira had learned the oft-forgotten lesson that the Christian life is a life of growth, of progress, of development. Ephesus was backsliding; Thyatira was moving forward...Which of these two churches do we resemble more?"

(Stott, p. 70)

2:20 "But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to

idols."

It was commonly believed the gods of Thyatira must be appeased for success in life and business. If you want to benefit from society, so they thought, you must bend to the will of the society. We may gratefully eat any food God provides, but when we eat we are not approving the cook's beliefs. There is a difference between 'take out orders' and embracing the 'full dining experience.' For those in Thyatira, the 'full experience' was prayers and incense to idols, excessive alcohol, and immoral acts with temple prostitutes. But this woman teacher told these wavering saints in Thyatira the "deep secret" that they could have it all. She promised they need not be afraid to embrace both the eating and the environment.

"How convenient in a city dominated by trade guilds, for a prophetess to reveal the deep secret that Christians need not suffer loss by refraining from the guilds' immoral and idolatrous celebrations!...Materialism, no less than persecution, is the serpent's weapon of war against Christ's church." (Johnson, p. 81).

Most in this 'scattered field' congregation condoned the false teaching and its license to sin. Possibly, though not likely, they were ignorant of the problems going on around them. To ignore truth is to invite falsehood. Jesus holds them responsible for their inattention: "you tolerate that woman Jezebel...by her teaching she misleads" (v 20). Jesus loves them, but He hates

their carelessness. They had either a poor conscience or feeble courage.

2:21 "I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality."

Jezebel died a horrible death about nine hundred years earlier. She was the pagan Queen of Israel who transferred worship from Yahweh to Baal. Jesus sees her moral lies resurrected here in Thyatira by this teacher who saw no conflict between prayers and prostitutes. Her lie alleged that behaviour is not connected to belief and doctrine is not related to duty. Watch out! If you want to dine with the devil, you'd better have a long spoon.

"If you wish to get ahead in Thyatira you must belong to a guild; if you belong to a guild, your very membership implies that you worship its god. You will be expected to attend the guild festivals and to eat food that has been offered to the tutelary (protector) deity and which you receive on your table as a gift from that god. And then, when the feast ends, and the real - grossly immoral - fun begins, you must not walk out unless you desire to become the object of ridicule and persecution" (Hendriksen, p. 88).

2:22 "Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works."

"Her beastly system had engineered such a

complete divorce of morality from religion that it even encouraged gross sexual immorality under the cloak of piety" (Stott, p. 72).

Sin is ugly and its result is even uglier. "As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her...and no one will bury her" (2 Kings 9:10). Jezebel's lie led to Jezebel's end. God's patience with sinners will have a final day. And then all that we have done and said will be measured against the standard of His Truth. The 'Jezebel of Thyatira' also had a bitter end. And there was a similarly terrible end for her bed partners. The bed where they played became the bed where they paid. We who dwell in Christ's Church today must heed this strong warning: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (v 29).

Yet while there is life, there is still hope. With the word "unless" Jesus says this is still a time of grace, there is still opportunity to repent. No one can be sure how long that time will be. If we have heard His call of mercy, we must respond while there is still time.

2:23 "and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works."

Jesus "...did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (John 2:25). If Jesus had such clear perspective during His earthly humiliation,

how much more does He see from His present exaltation! In His perfect justice, even the 'children' of our unrighteousness will be punished. These grim words should drive us to humble obedience.

We can be very thankful that Jesus not only sees into hearts, He changes them. Paul's first convert in Europe was "a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14).

2:24 "But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden."

Amidst the moral compromise of this church were some who refused to embrace the lie. Their discerning ears understood that this 'new teaching' was not the voice of their Shepherd but a stranger (John 10:3-5). Jesus unmasks her lie, they understood this woman was a spokesperson for the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

Our Lord wisely did not impose any other burden on these faithful ones in Thyatira. He echoes the words of the Jerusalem Council; the apostolic decree to the Gentile churches read: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to *burden* you with anything beyond the following requirements..." (Acts 15:28, 29). It is often difficult to strike this balance in church life. Human behaviour can swing to extremes like the pendulum of

a clock. Often when a church is plagued by "Christian Jezebelites" who try to separate belief from behaviour, church leaders swing to an opposite extreme. They try and restrain Christian license with more laws. These laws are often ignored by the rebellious but can become a lure to legalism for the righteous. Law-keeping will never make us right with God.

2:25 "Only hold fast what you have until I come."

More laws cannot stop moral license. The Head of the Church wisely steers clear of both extremes, neither license nor legalism. Rather, He advances the Biblical truth of liberty - willing righteousness from a heart in love with Him. Jesus said, "I will not impose any other burden on you: Only hold on to what you have until I come." Jesus entrusts His chosen ones with His Word and Spirit and tells them to hold on!

2:26, 27 "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father."

Jesus' message ends with strong encouragement for the faithful (v. 26, 27). Jesus is nothing less than the God who rules all nations. Paul offers a similar motivation to believers: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians

6:2). Jesus is the solution for the perplexed believers in Thyatira. They were despised by the world, rejected by the guilds, outcasts in society. But Christ invests the faithful with the authority and power of God. They will reign with Him. "If Christ gives to the sinner as his works deserve, He will give to the conqueror far beyond what his works could ever begin to deserve" (Stott, p. 80).

2:28 "And I will give him the morning star."

Jesus adds these final words of blessing (v 28). When we see the morning star we know the darkness is almost over. The darkness is dreadful but it is destined to end. Jesus is the Morning Star, and He is coming soon. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16).

2:29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Sometimes the pressure of "fitting in" with the world is overwhelming, but we are to stand firm in our faith, trusting God to provide and to take care of us. We are also to stand firm on the truth of God's Word and not tolerate those who disregard and distort it.

"Every generation of Christians must face the question, 'How far should I accept and adopt contemporary standards and practices?' On the one hand, Christians must not deny the faith. On the other, they

must not deny their membership of society.
The cause of Christ is not served if Christians
appear as a group of old-fashioned people
always trying to retreat from the real world”
(Morris, p. 71).

D E A D ! !

S E S S I O N 5
R E V E L A T I O N 3 : 1 - 6

INTRODUCTION

Our study of Revelation makes clear that Jesus is concerned for the Church. Indeed, He died to build the Church and He lives to bless it. He is daily bringing people into it and forming those people to look like Himself; "... now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3.10,11). He will come again for this Church: we will be His bride and live eternally with Him in glory. These are wonderful truths – the angels are amazed as they watch all that Jesus is doing in and for the Church! But sometimes churches forget and fall. The fifth church in our study, Sardis, forgot.

Sardis, a city of wealth and fame, had a golden past. King Midas was thought to have removed his 'golden touch' by washing in a Sardis stream. Thus, legend says, he left 'gold dust in the silt' of her river. Sardis was the capital for King Croesus whose wealth has been immortalized in the phrase "to be as rich as Croesus." The first coins of gold and silver were struck in Sardis. And the art of dyeing wool was discovered here. By the 6th Century B.C. Sardis was one of the most powerful cities of the Ancient World.

Sardis was 50 kilometers south of Thyatira, at the junction of five main roads and along the main postal route. It was a strongly fortified city; situated on a rock plateau with perpendicular walls 500 meters high. This protected city could only be accessed from a narrow neck of land from the south. Twice during their history, 549 and 218 B.C., Sardis was surprised and defeated by attacking enemies. Skilful climbers attacked this naturally fortified city at night, surprising the overconfident citizens. In 17 A.D. the city was partially destroyed by an earthquake, and again her unprepared citizens were caught by surprise.

Jesus warns this church to 'wake up' because he is coming unexpectedly. He will surprise them like a thief. They must remember when their citizens vainly trusted in their own resources for protection. In a similar way, their Christians placed too much trust in themselves. Jesus noticed that the church had a good name among the citizens of Sardis. The world was impressed with them, "you have a reputation of being alive" (v 1). Perhaps the other churches that did not enjoy such peace with their neighbours viewed them with envy.

"I dare say its congregation was quite large for those days, and was growing and even fashionable. Its programme included many excellent projects. It was positively humming with activity. There was no shortage in the church of money or talent or manpower. There was every indication of life and vigour" (Stott, p. 84).

The evaluation that matters most comes from God. And it seems that Jesus does not think they are worthy of their good reputation. The church in Sardis was comfortably at home in this lost and lying world. It is likely they knew the Word but it seems they did not follow it faithfully. Contrary to their high esteem in secular society, the Saviour said "I know your deeds..." Jesus' words to the Sardis church sent shock waves stronger than an earthquake, "you are dead" (v 1).

"In spite of their faults, in all the churches so far addressed Christ has recognized much good. What will he find to commend in Sardis? Nothing. The only 'good' she has is a good reputation, for which in fact there is no basis" (Wilcock, p. 51).

O P E N I N G

We are often very careful when we speak about the deceased, they have “gone on” or “passed away” or “gone home” or are “not here.” But Jesus uses the word of grim finality to describe the church in Sardis, “*You are dead.*” Why was He so blunt? Should we speak more directly?

D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S

1. How does a dead church look (verse 1)? Do they have people? Programs? Bibles? Do decreasing numbers indicate a dying church? Do increasing numbers prove a church is alive? How can we as the church make sure to stay alive?
2. List the five commands Jesus gave to this church (verses 2 and 3). Which of these do you need to hear most today?
3. Jesus exhorted them to “strengthen the things that remain” (verse 2). What “things” are vital to prevent a church from dying? How can you help your church strengthen these things?
4. Jesus exhorts them to remember what they have received (verse 3). How does one get to the place where he forgets what God has given?
5. What are two things this church was commended for (verses 1 and 4)? How is it possible to have a “good” reputation and yet be “dead”? What is your reputation outwardly? Does it accurately reflect the state of your heart? How do you remain strong in the faith when you are the only Christian in your setting?

6. Do you have any fear that your name might be erased from the book of life (verse 5)? Some think this verse proves that one can lose his salvation. How do these verses speak to that idea (John 10:27-29, Romans 8:35-39, Ephesians 1:13-14, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 13:5, 1 John 5:13)? How does Scripture interpret Scripture in this important question?

A P P L I C A T I O N & D I S C U S S I O N A T T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

“Church people are Christians.” This is widely believed in our world. People must be “Christians” if they are baptized...married in a church...take communion...ordained! But Jesus calls those in the church of Sardis “dead”! Should we use the word “Christian” more carefully?

F O R F U R T H E R S T U D Y

1. Our understanding of the unbeliever determines our ministry to them. Are they simply misguided and need more education? Or, just sick and needing some therapy? Or, dead and needing resurrection (consider these verses Genesis 2:17, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:1, Luke 15:24)?
2. The Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men” (Isaiah 29:13). How might these ancient words have applied to Sardis? How do they apply to us? To our church?
3. How is the church at Sardis like the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:27-28?

- What can we learn about being spiritually alive from these passages (John 6:63, John 7:37-39, John 15:5, and Ephesians 5:15-21)? Describe the Spirit-filled life. Are you drawing “life” from the Holy Spirit, or are you looking to other sources?
- How would these promises encourage a “remnant” of faithful believers in a dead church (Malachi 3:16-18, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Hebrews 6:10-12)?
- According to these passages, what is the significance of being “clothed in white” (Revelation 3:18, Revelation 7:9-17, Revelation 19:7-8)?
- Are you in a situation where you feel “spiritually alone” without much support? Remember that He is always there and is aware of your situation. This book was written to give you hope! “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). How has this study of Revelation encouraged you?

S C R I P T U R E N O T E S

R E V E L A T I O N 3 : 1 - 6

3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”’

Sardis boasted of their huge Temple of Artemis who claimed the power to bring the dead to life. But Jesus holds the true life-giving power; the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The perfect / complete “seven-fold Spirit of God” makes the Word of Gospel messengers / “stars” life-giving and powerful by the decree of the Exalted Jesus (John 5:25).

This church was too good. They were at peace with the world. They faced no persecution from the Romans and no slander from the Jews. There was no Jezebel, no Balaam, no Nicolaitans, no Satan – and no real life in this church. It was as peaceful as a cemetery. Jesus warns against having too much peace in this world that is hostile to the Gospel, “Woe to you when *all men speak well of you*, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). They claimed to be Christian, but there was not enough evidence to prove them guilty.

“Why did both Jews and Romans leave this church undisturbed? The answer may be its lack of aggressive and positive Christianity.

Content with mediocrity, lacking both the enthusiasm to entertain a heresy and the depth of conviction which provokes intolerance, it was too harmless to be worth persecuting” (Morris, p. 75).

3:2 “Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.”

“This lesson is devastatingly relevant for us. Groups can bear the name of a church, and have a certain reputation, when it is doubtful that they are truly churches at all. The essence of a church is not its programs, buildings, past achievements, reputation, institutional greatness, or formal doctrinal correctness, but its spiritual life. This life comes only through fellowship with the living Christ, and is demonstrated through the seriousness of repentance and obedience” (Poythress, p. 90).

Despite this scathing indictment of Jesus, it is not too late for Sardis. Their situation is horrible, but not hopeless. Jesus mercifully offers them five commands to follow to return to Him. First, “wake up!” They are asleep in the light of His grace. Just as their city was twice attacked by surprise, this church is in great danger. This is a military command to prepare for battle. There are still a few Kingdom embers that “remain”

glowing in Sardis. Stir the fire, fan the flame, before they are all cold (Romans 13:11).

3:3 "Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."

Thieves do not make appointments. Neither can this church know the coming of their Lord and Judge. Jesus is not speaking about His second coming, because the final day will not be determined by Sardis' repentance. This "hour I will come against you" will be a unique visitation of judgment by Him who "has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."

Given the serious nature of His warning, this church should "remember." Politically, they should recall the former prestige of their now declining city of Sardis. But, more importantly, they should remember the clear Gospel promises they once embraced by living faith; looking to the surpassing glory of King Jesus. He is the true wealth they should "keep." And these sacred remembrances should lead them to "repent" and reorder their lives to His Kingdom standard.

3:4 "Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

The ancients believed dirty garments

dishonoured their deities. You could be banned from temples in Roman Asia for wearing soiled clothing. Sardis boasted of their wool and their dyed fabrics. But Jesus offers them finer dress. In the Roman world people were identified by their clothing. Only the Emperor and Patricians could wear purple togas. The Equestrian class wore red. White was worn for festive victory celebrations. Apparently those in the Sardis church were "doing" much. But Jesus' plea is for them to "walk with me in white." The King of Kings invites the faithful few in the Sardis church to join His triumphal procession. In this society where "clothes made the man," faithful discipleship will be their garment of praise.

3:5 "The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."

Seven times in Revelation the faithful are pictured in white garments. The Jewish Essenes in the community at Qumran wore white robes to symbolize their purity. They looked to the promise of the final Old Covenant prophet, "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap" (Malachi 3:2). Jesus, the fulfilment of all God's promises, now stands on our behalf before the Father. On the cross He conquered our sin and death; as the Risen One He will clothe the faithful, "they have washed their robes and made them

white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:13, 14).

Even their promise contains a warning. Most of the dead church in Sardis will be lost, **maybe** you might not be! "The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33). A disobedient Jew could be cast out of the holy nation. In Sardis a disloyal citizen could be blotted out of the city registry. Those who are not wearing the wedding dress will not enter the marriage feast. The "Christian" dead in Sardis are not living now, and will not live eternally. This is not a threat about losing one's salvation (see John 10:28), it is a challenge to make sure that you have ever had it. For those who confess Jesus on earth, He will confess them in heaven.

"The imagery must not be interpreted literally...It would be altogether wrong to imagine an activity of constant book-keeping in heaven, involving not only the registration of new names but also the removal of names previously entered and the restoration of names previously removed. Such a conception could only be conducive to insecurity on the part of God's people (whose names might be in his book today and out tomorrow) and to uncertainty even in the mind of God himself regarding the ultimate outcome of his redemptive action, which is unthinkable" (Hughes, p. 57).

3:6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Sleeping Sardis was twice invaded by attacking enemies. Overconfidence and complacency led to their defeat when they let their guard down. Now the Judge of all the earth calls this church to wake up from death. May the Spirit of resurrection life give them ears of faith to hear Him!

GO FOR IT!!

SESSION 6
REVELATION 3:7-13

INTRODUCTION

Churches are collections of people, so they have personalities, just as people do. As we have seen in the five previous letters of our Lord to the churches, Jesus has a specific message of challenge and comfort for each of them. Two of the churches, Smyrna and now Philadelphia, hear nothing but commendation for their good deeds.

Ancient Philadelphia (the modern Turkish city of Alashehir) was located 50 kilometers southeast of Sardis. Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities. It was founded about B.C. 150 by Attalus II Philadelphus. The name of the city literally means “lover of his brother,” declaring the devotion of Attalus to his brother Eumenes. The Romans called Philadelphia a “missionary city.” They were entrusted with spreading Greek culture to the newly annexed adjacent regions of Lydia and Phrygia. Because of its commercial importance, Philadelphia was considered the “Gateway to the East.” Its location at the eastern end of a broad valley that led to the Aegean Sea was strategic. Several important trade routes converged in the city. The Christians in Philadelphia were called to utilize those natural advantages for the advancement of the Gospel. “As the ‘keeper of the gateway to the plateau,’ this church had been given a unique opportunity to carry the gospel to the cities of Phrygia” (Ramsay, p. 391).

Most believers in Philadelphia would have felt overwhelmed by their challenges. That is why Jesus reminds them of His power and purpose. The Christians in Philadelphia had been excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue. Since these Jewish leaders in Philadelphia had more social, economic, and political power, they thought they held the upper hand over this struggling church. But Jesus can open any door. Having ‘little strength’ is no problem to a Big God. So the faithful need not worry; their Lord opened the door for them into His eternal kingdom, and no one can shut it! The

hopeful theme of this letter is when God opens a door it is ‘unshutable.’ Once we have entered the door of salvation, we need to advance onward through the door of service.

“I have no doubt that the fierceness of this opposition to the truth tempted the Philadelphian Christians to hold their peace and mind their own business...But Christ was of another mind. It was in this very city where Jewish antagonism was so strong that he opened a door for the gospel” (Stott, p. 103).

The big problems they faced there in Gospel-hostile Philadelphia could have stifled their Kingdom service. Perhaps we also hesitate to speak out for Jesus amidst the struggles we face today. Yet Scripture reminds us that we will not receive full justice in this fallen world. We may never completely recover from losses we incur. We will never fully understand why this world is so evil. But God’s promises encourage us to trust Him as we press on by faith in this fallen world. Jesus’ door of salvation, service, and security is open to all the Church, from Philadelphia to the ends of the earth, from the first to the final century.

O P E N I N G

Jesus promises this church keys and open doors. It is possible to have a pocketful of keys and still be locked out of the house! We probably have many keys, but sometimes not the right ones. But Jesus’ keys will never jam, blunt, bend, or get lost. What do you need Him to open?

D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S

1. Jesus who holds the “key of David” is described as “holy and true” (verse 7). How would you define these two attributes and why are they often paired together in Scripture?
2. What four things does Jesus commend this church for in verse 8? Why would having “little power (strength)” be a good thing? What might Jesus be implying here (See also 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.)?
3. What are some circumstances in your life today in which you must persevere? How does this letter encourage you to press on?
4. What “open doors” has God put before you? Are we as a church making the most of the opportunities God has given to us for ministry? If not, what do we need to do? Are you using your gifts and talents wisely for His glory?
5. In verse 11, Jesus says, “I am coming soon.” How is this “coming” different from the “comings” He promises in the previous letters (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3)?

6. Jesus gives great promises to this faithful church (verse 12). Why would becoming “a pillar” be hopeful in a city subject to earthquakes? What does “never shall he go out of it” mean for our lives? What three names does Jesus promise to write on the overcomer?

APPLICATION & DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT SESSION

Sometimes the power of God shines brightest when the church lacks all human power. This was seen in recent years through the Church in Romania. Oppressive Communist leaders did all they could to crush the Church. Believers in Jesus were hounded, persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and even martyred. But they prayed and persevered by the grace of God. Today even secular analysts say this ‘weak’ church was influential in bringing down the dictatorial regime in Romania. When the brutal leadership quickly toppled, a sign on a church bulletin board told the story: “The Lamb Won!” Is the Lamb winning in your city? Your nation? Your life?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Jesus is described as He “who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens” (verse 7). How do Isaiah 43:13 and 46:9-11 help clarify the meaning of this description?
2. The church at Philadelphia was commended for its obedience. Can you obey Christ without loving Him (See also John 14:23-24)? Think carefully. Share and pray with a trusted friend, asking God for more love.
3. Jesus promised that some of the Jews who were persecuting the Christians would come and bow down at their feet and know that

God had loved them (verse 9). The following Old Testament passages describe a future day when unbelieving Gentiles will bow down to the believing remnant of Israel (Isaiah 45:14, Isaiah 49:23, Isaiah 60:14-15). How has the Gospel for all people changed the way these promises are now fulfilled?

4. Jesus tells this missionary church to “hold fast what you have, so no one will take your crown.” Paul calls his Philippian converts his “joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1). What might cause those in Philadelphia to have someone “seize your crown”? Who will be your crown?
5. According to 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; and Colossians 4:3, what is one possible meaning of the phrase, “I have put before you an open door which no one can shut”? What would be another possible meaning according to Acts 14:27?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

REVELATION 3:7-13

3:7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens."

Important people are known by their keys. Keys point to trust and responsibility. Jesus holds all authority and is eminently worthy of our trust. This is pictured by "the key of David" (Revelation 22:16). Unlike the previous five letters, this description of Jesus is not drawn from the vision in Revelation 1:12-18. This key of the house of David was taken from Shebna and given to Eliakim. Shebna the steward abused his position and tried to steal the king's luxuries for himself (Isaiah 22:15-23), and so loses his right to David's key. Now the faithful in Philadelphia who hold this key have "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3).

The Jews in Philadelphia, like Shebna, committed the greatest abuse of their stewardship by rejecting their Messiah - "him who is holy and true, who holds the key." As God's rightful key keeper, Jesus seeks no revenge. Although the Jews slanderously charged Him 'a false Messiah,' Jesus is genuine. Furthermore, He is faithful. He is the ultimate Promise Keeper and will finish His messianic task. He is holy - unique, set

apart, incomparable - the attribute most often used to describe the God of the Bible. "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18). Even death, which for us is so final and invincible, is no threat to Him. Jesus can taunt death and hell, rightfully boasting that He holds their keys.

These authoritative keys of Jesus are operated through His powerful words, "the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key." God sent this Word to these seven afflicted churches. Each one faced unique threats and temptations. But to each one Jesus offers words of strength and victory. Jesus' words can transform the darkest night. That is the very purpose of this book: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it" (Revelation 1:3). Now Jesus is the rightful owner of the keys, and the house! By the blood of the Lamb, the nations will stream into His city - with the gates always open! (Revelation 21:2,24-26).

3:8 "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

This promise of Jesus would have been especially wonderful to the small and despised congregation in Philadelphia. Most churches, then and now, are small, and have little social status in their communities (1 Corinthians 1:26, 27). Nevertheless, this small church was noticed by our Divine Keyholder. Their works that the world thought were meager were really mighty when given to Him. This little church in ancient Philadelphia had the additional challenge of being hated by the Jews. As we saw in Smyrna, the Roman Empire granted special privileges to the notoriously hard-to-govern Jews. The earliest Jewish Christians benefited from these protections. But as the Church became increasingly Gentile, the leaders of the synagogue in Philadelphia tried to close all doors to these struggling Christians. As the Jews sought to destroy this church, they were really denying Jesus.

3:9 "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars - I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."

We see again that the Old Testament is key to opening the meaning of Revelation. Jesus here refers to an ancient prophecy which is now fulfilled in His reign as Lord of the Church. "The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD...Although you have been forsaken and hated...I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all

generations...Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (Isaiah 60:14-16). The Jews were shocked to discover that promise was kept right there in Philadelphia, and they were on the wrong end of it! They were smugly convinced by their blood and history that only they were the people of God. But to reject the Son is to reject the Father. These Jews forfeited their privileges by unbelief in the One. They slandered and persecuted the true followers of their Covenant God. "Now in the grim irony of providence, what the Jews fondly expected from the Gentiles, they themselves will be forced to render to the Christians. They will play the role of the heathen and acknowledge that the church is the true Israel of God"

(Stott, p. 104).

Jesus says things are not always as they seem. Since these Jewish leaders had more social, economic, and political power in Philadelphia, they thought they held the upper hand over the church. But Jesus can open any door. In our post-Holocaust era such strong words about Jews sound especially harsh. But we need to keep these words of Jesus, the true son of Israel, in perspective. "Since John himself had been born a Jew, we must not take the expression 'synagogue of Satan' in an anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic sense. The synagogue at Philadelphia was criticized, not for being Jewish, but for being hostile to Christians" (Metzger, p. 41).

Society says, "It is who you know that

counts." They are right. Yet unfortunately for most of them, they do not know Jesus. Because He is the one who opens the most important doors. He is the doorkeeper of the eternal judgment of God; He is the narrow way to life. The way to true life is to be loved by Him. Jesus said, "I am the door; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9, cf. Matthew 7:13,14, Revelation 22:14, 15).

3:10 "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."

Jesus warns that this door leads to difficulty. Believers in Philadelphia are warned to brace themselves for the coming persecution. Christ promises deliverance through trial, not from trials. Nearly two thousand bloody years of Church history have proven this truth. In this book we hear the martyrs cry: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"... they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed" (Revelation 6:10, 11).

Most of us would interpret opposition as evidence that God had not opened a door. Not Paul, who writes, "a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me" (1 Corinthians 16:9).

Paul understood that opposition is one

indication of God's true work. It cannot be different. When the message of righteousness falls on unrighteous ears, when the light exposes darkness, when holiness reveals unholiness – sinners react with anger. This is not to say that opposition is always a sign that we must proceed. But it must not be seen as a sign to retreat.

Notice Jesus' tone of warning here. Keeping His word is not negotiable. We forsake His word at our own peril. Keeping His word with patient endurance ensures being kept by Him. We are called to keep the Word not just for our own salvation, but also to bring His word of salvation to others. (See Matthew 16:19, 2 Corinthians 2:16-17). "Christ has the keys. He opens the doors. Let us not barge through doors which are still closed...More mistakes are probably made by speed than by sloth...If the door is shut, don't put your shoulder to it. Wait till Christ takes out the keys and opens it" (John Stott).

3:11 "I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."

The word for crown here is a victor's wreath. Since Philadelphia was known for its athletic games and festivals, this symbol of honour would have been a recognizable treasure. But we are in a race far more significant and earn results far more enduring. In previous letters to His churches, Jesus warns that His coming will be fearful. To the unrepentant in Ephesus Jesus warns, "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place"

(Revelation 2:5). To those in Pergamum who held the teaching of the Nicolaitans, Jesus "will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:16). To those who slumbered in Sardis Jesus threatened, "I will come like a thief" (Revelation 3:3). But Jesus is coming to fight for those persecuted and powerless saints in Philadelphia. He exhorts them to hold on so they will not lose their reward. The conquering king comes.

3:12 "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."

Philadelphia was devastated by an earthquake in 17 A.D. By the time this letter was written, the city had been rebuilt. But many people still lived outside in fear of another killer quake. Jesus promised permanence to those living in that fearful city. "The Lord's promise that the overcomer will be a pillar in the temple of my God is a promise of full and abiding power and dignity in the cosmic spiritual sanctuary that he is raising up...a pillar, by its nature and function, is not removable! The Psalmist rejoiced in the same assurance when he confidently declared, 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever'" (Hughes, p. 62). Everything else may shake, but "we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). You may be a

fearful pilgrim in this life, but in Jesus you will become a firm pillar in the next.

Twice in its brief history the city of Philadelphia got a new name. After the great earthquake of A.D. 17 they took the name Neocaesarea -'New Caesar'- in appreciation for the Imperial help they received for their rebuilding. During his reign, Roman Emperor Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) gave another new name; the name "Flavia" appeared on their coins. Jesus promised even better changes for his beloved in that city. Throughout Scripture people like Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Peter received new names after their transforming encounters with God. Their new name held new promise of future blessing. Here Jesus expands the wondrous promises to His overcomers. Our encounter with Jesus is triply transforming- we will be granted a three-fold inscription: the name of His God, the name of God's city, and His own new name (see Revelation 14:1).

3:13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

God promised Eliakim the faithful steward: "I will drive him like a peg into a firm place" (Isaiah 22:23).

These faithful ones who may have lost jobs and status amidst the persecution in Philadelphia are promised a reward which no man can steal. His message is to every member in each Church, spoken at one time for all time. So we must listen with great care.

NEITHER HOT, NOR COLD

SESSION 7
REVELATION 3:14 - 22

INTRODUCTION

Many Christians speak nostalgically about the Early Church. They wistfully think the young church was truly alive and real – far better than churches today. But we have seen in our studies that the ‘good old days’ of the church were not that good! The church in Ephesus would rather fight theological battles than display love for hurting people. The church in Smyrna was seen as aloof and rejected by their neighbours. Church leaders in Pergamum climbed into bed with political and social leaders. Secret sexual scandal spread across the congregation in Thyatira. The church in Sardis had an impressive image but no true substance. The few members in the church of Philadelphia struggled to hold on to Him in a city that hated them. Truly the Early Church was much like the Church today.

Laodicea was located in Lycus Valley, 80 kilometers south-east of Philadelphia. Antiochus II of Syria (B.C. 261 – 246) named the city after his wife (and sister?) Laodice. Located at the juncture of 3 important Imperial trade routes, Laodicea became a rich commercial centre. It was the wealthiest city in Phrygia. They were situated on fertile ground that was good for grazing sheep. Their carefully bred flocks produced soft glossy black wool that was in great demand. Laodicea was so wealthy they did not need a Roman Imperial loan to rebuild their city after a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60. The city was also famous for its ancient medicine, particularly an eye salve. All three industries – wool, finance, and eye salve – were well known by the all-seeing Lord Jesus.

Jesus also knows the source of Laodicea’s greatest shame. This growing city lacked the basic requirement of drinking water. But they were rich enough to solve that problem. Ten kilometers across the Lycus valley from Laodicea was the city of Hierapolis which was famous for their hot springs. Cold springs of pure water were eighteen kilometers to their west near

Colossae. So Laodiceans built aqueducts to provide their city with both hot and cold running water. But unfortunately the stone pipes which carried the water from the hot springs in Hierapolis soon became clogged with lime. As the cool water journeyed to Laodicea it arrived lukewarm. So their great experiment became their great embarrassment! Their city water was neither hot nor cold, but laughably lukewarm.

In a similar way the church in Laodicea trusted in their own resources and ended up making a mess of things. Instead of humbly receiving the best gifts from their gracious Lord, they thought they could do things better on their own. Having started with Jesus they tried to continue in their own strength. “The man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). This smug church receives a stinging rebuke from God’s faithful and true witness.

“The Laodicean church was a halfhearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the 21st Century church. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion” (Stott, p. 116).

OPENING

“Affluenza” is a new word created to describe our affluent consumer society. With so many possessions modern materialists can easily become isolated, bored, passive, and lacking in motivation. It seems First Century Laodicea also suffered from this Twenty-First Century condition. How are you coping with affluenza?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what situations of life are you most encouraged by His faithfulness and truth (verse 14)? If you truly rested in God’s faithfulness and truth, how would that impact your life?
2. The cold water from Colossae piped into Laodicea was meant to be refreshing. The water from the hot springs in Hierapolis was meant to be medicinal. But the disappointing result was both brought lukewarm, barely drinkable, water. (verses 15 and 16) How would you recognize a lukewarm individual or church? How can you help them?
3. The Laodicean church was guilty of self-sufficiency. In what areas of your life do you lean toward self-sufficiency instead of looking to Christ’s sufficiency?
4. What three things does Jesus advise the Laodiceans to “buy” from Him and why (verse 18)? Is He talking to believers or nonbelievers here? Have any of your ‘strengths’ – individual, national, or as a church – become your ‘weaknesses’?

5. "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline..." (Verse 19). Why does Jesus say this at this point in the letter? How is it related to what He was just saying and is about to say?
6. Is verse 20 a gospel invitation to come to Christ or an invitation to intimate fellowship with Him? Is this verse directed to an individual or to the church; to unbelievers or believers or both? Explain your answer.
7. What lessons can we learn from the church at Laodicea that would make us more effective? What changes do you need to make as you reflect on Jesus' message to this church?

APPLICATION & DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT SESSION

This final letter contains the strongest rebuke and the sweetest romance from Jesus. He yearns for their repentance. "The pride of Laodicea was infectious. Christians caught the plague. The spirit of complacency crept into the church and tainted it. Members of the church became smug and self-satisfied. Jesus Christ needed to bluntly expose them" (Stott, p. 118). Remember, as we conclude this study, Jesus has not left us in this world to conform to it, but to work to change it for the glory of His name!

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Amidst the empty materialistic promises of affluent Laodicea, Jesus tells them He is true and trustworthy. Consider how these Scriptures help you to more fully trust Him who is the "Amen" to all God's promises (Isaiah 65:16, John 14:6, 2 Corinthians 1:20, Revelation 19:11).
2. This is not the first time we read about the church at Laodicea. What do we know about this church from these verses (Colossians 2:1, Colossians 4:12-17)?
3. Laodicea's neighbour church in Colossae needed clear teaching about the Deity of Jesus (Colossians 1:15-18, 2:2, 3, 9, 10). Perhaps some in Laodicea were tempted to deny this doctrine too. "... the beginning of God's creation" (verse 15) is the clearest reference to Jesus' eternal pre-existence in Revelation. How does the Deity of Jesus impact your daily life?
4. How does the story of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) relate to this church?
5. How do reproof and discipline play a role in loving someone (See Hebrews 12:6-11)?
6. Is your relationship with Christ growing in intimacy, or is He standing outside, waiting for you to involve Him in your life? Do you desire intimate fellowship with Him; and if so, how are you bringing it about?
7. Spend some time today reflecting on this study and how God has most spoken to you through these letters to the seven churches. What hinders you from hearing the Spirit as He speaks through the Word?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

REVELATION 3:14 - 22

3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."

"...the God whose name is Amen... the God of Amen" (Isaiah 65:16 New English Bible) has revealed Himself as fully trustworthy in Jesus Christ. He invites believers in a city that trusts in its own riches and achievements to remember that His faithfulness is from of old (John 3:11, 2 Corinthians 1:20). Long before the world was created, Jesus was faithful and true. "... the beginning of God's creation" is the most explicit reference to Jesus' eternal pre-existence in the book of Revelation.

"For the sake of this disastrous church, Jesus presents himself as the beginning, the origin of God's creation, the one who is able to go right down into the chaotic abyss of Laodicea's failure and make her anew, as he once made the world" (Wilcock, p. 57).

3: 15, 16 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."

Honesty is the beginning of true blessings. Strong words that we do not like to hear can

sometimes be just what we need to hear. Our Lord loves them enough (verse 19) to begin with this blunt reminder of Laodicea's most famous failure. Just as their citizens do not enjoy the lukewarm water piped into their city, their tepid religion is nauseating to the Lord of the Church. Their sin is not their temperature, but their absence of good works. Jesus knows. Will they allow the Lord to be this honest with them? Will they be honest enough to confess their sin and turn back in faith to Him?

3: 17 "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

Desperation can make us cry out to God. But apparently this church had no persecution from without and no heresy from within. This ease made the Laodiceans smug and self-confident. Their prosperity blinded them to their spiritual poverty. Their arms were too full of things to reach out to God. Their perceived strengths are what Jesus sees as their weakness. They thought themselves rich, Jesus says they are poor. They were the envy of Asia, but Jesus pitied them. Their famous 'Phrygian powder' eye salve claimed to cure blindness; Jesus said it did not work. They wore fine black wool clothing, but Jesus gazes through their

garments. "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

3: 18 "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."

Jesus talks business with these foolish traders. He urges these rich Laodiceans to use their money wisely. Buy from Him! Jesus' true gold is tested and proven by fire. "Remove your black dress of mourning and change into my white robe of life and victory!" And He who made our eyes can guarantee to cure our blindness so we can really see. He calls them to stop trusting in their city's proud strength in exchange for His true, eternal, riches (Luke 14:33). "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (John 9:39). When we find the best from Jesus, we can no longer afford to buy the cheap stuff.

3: 19 "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."

This hard letter from Jesus is not just an anonymous email or a drive-by rebuke. He loves them. That is why he gets in their face. He tells them what is wrong with them and, best of all, he tells them how to get right. He disciplines them so they

will become better disciples. Turn from sin and turn to the Saviour. The best athletes and the finest scholars get the hardest and most demanding training. The Lord of love hopes for great days ahead in the church of Laodicea.

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:6, 7).

3: 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

How sad and shocking that the Lord of the Church is standing outside the church in Laodicea. The Gospels record how Jesus was an outcast – born in a stable, hung on a cross. But we expect to find Him at home in the church He bought with His blood. Yet this heavenly gentleman politely knocks. He is not the big, bad, wolf; He will not blow the house down. "The only cure for luke-warmness is the readmission of the excluded Christ" (G. Campbell Morgan in Wilcock, p. 58). Perhaps not all in Laodicea will open up, but Jesus calls them one and all. Should they invite Him in, they will feast. They will find life when their life is hid with God in Christ. Prophets yearned expectantly for the Messiah's rich banquet. Now He comes Crucified and Risen to invite Laodiceans to His feast, "Come, everyone...come, buy and eat!...without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live..." (Isaiah 55:1-3, see also Isaiah 25:6, Zechariah 8:7, 8, 20-23, Ezekiel 39:17-20, Exodus 24:1-11). The wedding supper of the Lamb is near!

"Our home becomes his home; the lordship we had assumed becomes his lordship; the guest we invite in proves to be the true host: his dining with us becomes our dining with him. For it is only through his abiding in us that we truly abide in him: the one abiding is inseparable from the other" (Hughes, p. 68).

3: 20 "I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

John pictures Jesus dwelling in His Church (Revelation 1:12, 13, 20). During His earthly ministry Jesus was criticized for His choice of company. Now, as the Exalted Lord He is still at home with hypocrites. The Church grows from strength to strength around the world; but local churches are opened and closed on regular basis. Just as He warned the Ephesian church, the lampstand of His presence can be removed. If they let Him in they will delight, if they refuse they will be devastated.

"Nothing can exceed the desolation and melancholy appearance of the site of Laodicea today. The fragments of aqueducts

and theatres spread over a vast extent of country tell of the former magnificence of this city; but of its once famous church nothing survives" (C.J. Vaughn in Stott, p. 120).

3: 21 "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

The Conquering King graciously invites sinners to share in His victory. The battle is over, the building is done, the Master sits down in glory. From His place of power He extends life and strength that we may conquer in Him. "If we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12, Matthew 19:28).

3: 22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

For the seventh and last time we read this closing exhortation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. These seven letters, spoken by Jesus, written down by John the Apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, delivered to local churches in the ancient Roman world, have now been told to you too! These timeless messages to these ancient churches will speak to every church in every place in every age until Jesus comes again. Have you heard? Are you listening? "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17).

"Seven churches, different in so many ways

from one another. Seven churches, similar in so many ways to the churches in which we live and serve Jesus. What one thing do all these churches need to fortify them against the enemy's frontal assaults, to make them savvy to his subtle stratagems, and to make them loyal to God and compassionate toward their oppressors? They need Jesus voice. His voice comforts our weak and wounded hearts, diagnoses our diseases, shatters our dreams of ease here and now, and calls us forward to the consummation of his victory in the new Jerusalem. His voice addresses us today in his letters to the seven churches of Asia, for each letter is what the spirit says to the churches" (Johnson, p. 67).

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L O R D A M O N G T H E
L A M P S T A N D S
J E S U S A N D H I S C H U R C H

A S T U D Y O F R E V E L A T I O N 2 & 3

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 Jesus teaches the seven churches how to live in this world. It is not an easy balance to strike – if we imitate the world we will be ineffective in it, and if we are too isolated from it we will be insensitive to it.

The kingdom of our Crucified Lord was born in death, victorious by defeat, and powerful when powerless. Listen to the Head of the Church as He tells us how to be His Church....



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